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OLD WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE RESTORATION





## FOREWORD

There are few public buildings in all of Minnesota more worthy of preservation than the handsome Washington County Courthouse. In the late 1860's, this building was considered the finest work of Augustus Knight, Minnesota's first resident architect; that was when the courthouse at Stillwater was called an "ornament to the State"...as indeed it was!

Well over a hundred years have passed, and they have mellowed this beautiful, proud old building. It has withstood many a crisis and even some vilification, but with the dedicated work of many enthusiastic appreciative friends, this courthouse has survived to once again become...and to remain an "ornament to the State of Minnesota." May it ever stand on Zion's hill, an enduring symbol, a memorable and tangible reminder for future generations of a glorious past. Not only Washington County, but all of Minnesota should join your efforts to preserve for at least another one hundred years what can become one of Minnesota's most treasured historic buildings.

*Mr. Dunn, for 17 years chief librarian on the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, is a resident of Washington County and St. Paul and a research associate for the Society. He is an author of historical note, having published two books of area-wide interest: The St. Croix: Midwest Border River (1965) and Marine on St. Croix: From Lumber Village to Summer Haven (1968). He was instrumental in the original attempts to save the courthouse from the wrecking ball in the early and mid 1960's.*

*James Taylor Dunn*





## WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Minnesota's first courthouse, a three-room frame structure erected at the corner of 4th and Chestnut Street in Stillwater in 1849, had become inadequate by 1866. On November 6 of that year, Washington County voters approved funds for the construction of a new building.

For the magnificent sum of \$5, Socrates Nelson, a prominent Stillwater lumberman, and Mrs. Elizabeth M. Churchill offered the city a block of property on "Zion's Hill." By the time ground-breaking ceremonies were held in April, 1867, Augustus F. Knight, St. Paul's first resident architect, had been commissioned to design the building. His unique design reflects the Italianate style then so popular. Constructed of native sandstone faced with red brick, the courthouse features a projecting portico with two tiers of ten rounded arches.

Two local contractors, George M. Seymour and William M. May, supervised the construction which was completed during the winter and spring of 1869-70, despite the seemingly insurmountable difficulty of laying the imported English floor tiles in the correct pattern. The courthouse stands today as "an ornament to the city" and "a credit to the county."



ERECTED BY MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
1968



"1867 to Future Generations"  
This legend typifies the spirit of the Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation in its efforts at program development and building renovation and restoration of this most historic landmark.





The Washington County Courthouse is a legacy left to the public by a visionary architect, Augustus Knight, long regarded as the Dean of Minnesota Architects. Built at a cost of \$46,500.00, it stands today as the state's most beautiful county courthouse.



*Photo courtesy of Mr. Chester Wilson,  
longtime attorney in Stillwater.*







*"The Washington County Courthouse has served the area for over one hundred years, and the St. Croix Valley Chamber of Commerce is happy to endorse a program designed to restore this wonderful monument to Washington County."*

September 10, 1976

DAVID ECKBERG, *Executive Director*

SCVCOC

Commanding a breathtaking view of the St. Croix valley, this courthouse has served the citizens of Washington County and the State of Minnesota for over one hundred years as the center of government activities. Many of the materials used in the construction of the building were cut and quarried in and around the Washington County area. The floor tiles were shipped from England in 1867 and are still in use and in excellent condition.







*"If just one courthouse in the Midwest was destined  
for preservation, I would choose this historic courthouse  
for that purpose."*

RUSSELL FRIDLEY, *Director*  
Minnesota Historical Society  
July 4, 1976 — Dedication

During a period when it seemed better to tear down the old buildings rather than search for alternative uses, a very few people took up the cause to fight to save this most historic building. Through their efforts the Minnesota Historical Society placed the Courthouse on the National Register of Historic Places in 1967. This action helped to save this landmark from the destruction which has taken so many other architectural treasures from our midst.





The Washington County Historic Courthouse is undoubtedly an architectural gem. It's simple lines recount past years and artisans whose work cannot be easily duplicated. The building was designed to serve people for generations and stands today as a symbol of past accomplishments and future dreams.



*"As the oldest courthouse in the State of Minnesota,  
the structure stands as solid evidence that the past  
is not a vanishing memory, but a tangible  
community resource."*

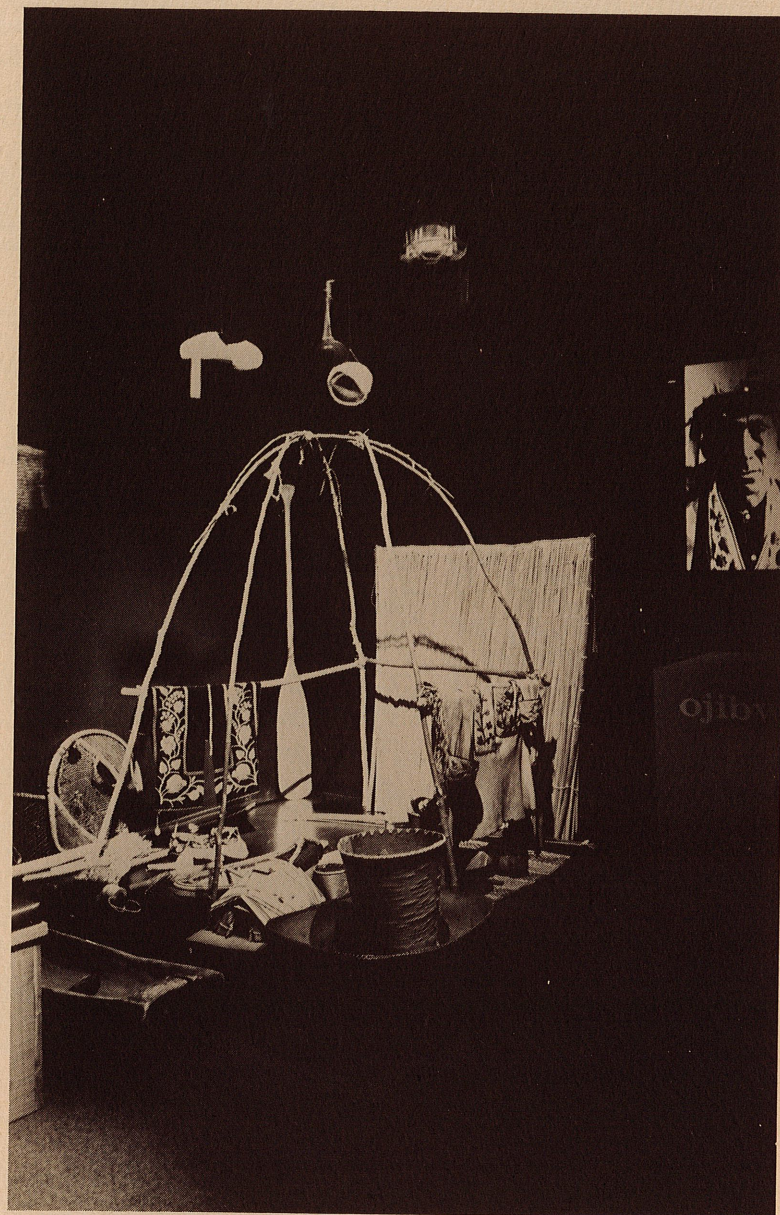
WENDELL R. ANDERSON,  
Governor  
State of Minnesota

In April of 1975 a group of concerned citizens of Washington County formed the Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation. The purpose of the volunteer committee was to raise funds to restore the building and develop therein a program consistent with the directive received from the County Board of Commissioners — to preserve our historic past through preservation of Minnesota's oldest government landmark and develop a model program that is primarily participatory in nature and educational in concept. Working together with public agencies and private organizations such as the Science Center of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Minnesota Zoological Garden, the Washington County Historical Society and local military organizations, an exciting and unique "people oriented" and ever-changing program is taking form. In the view of the Foundation, it isn't enough that this and other old structures be preserved; they must "come alive" to serve a useful purpose for many people. To preserve only for the sake of preservation is a waste of a valuable resource. Shown in the photo are, left to right, Jess Mottaz, Foundation Vice President; Ray Marshall, Foundation Secretary; J. Ed Cass, Foundation President; Anna Engquist, Director; Louise Johnson, Director; Gary Laidig, State Legislator, Director; Tom Langford, Executive Secretary; Wendell Anderson, then Governor of Minnesota.

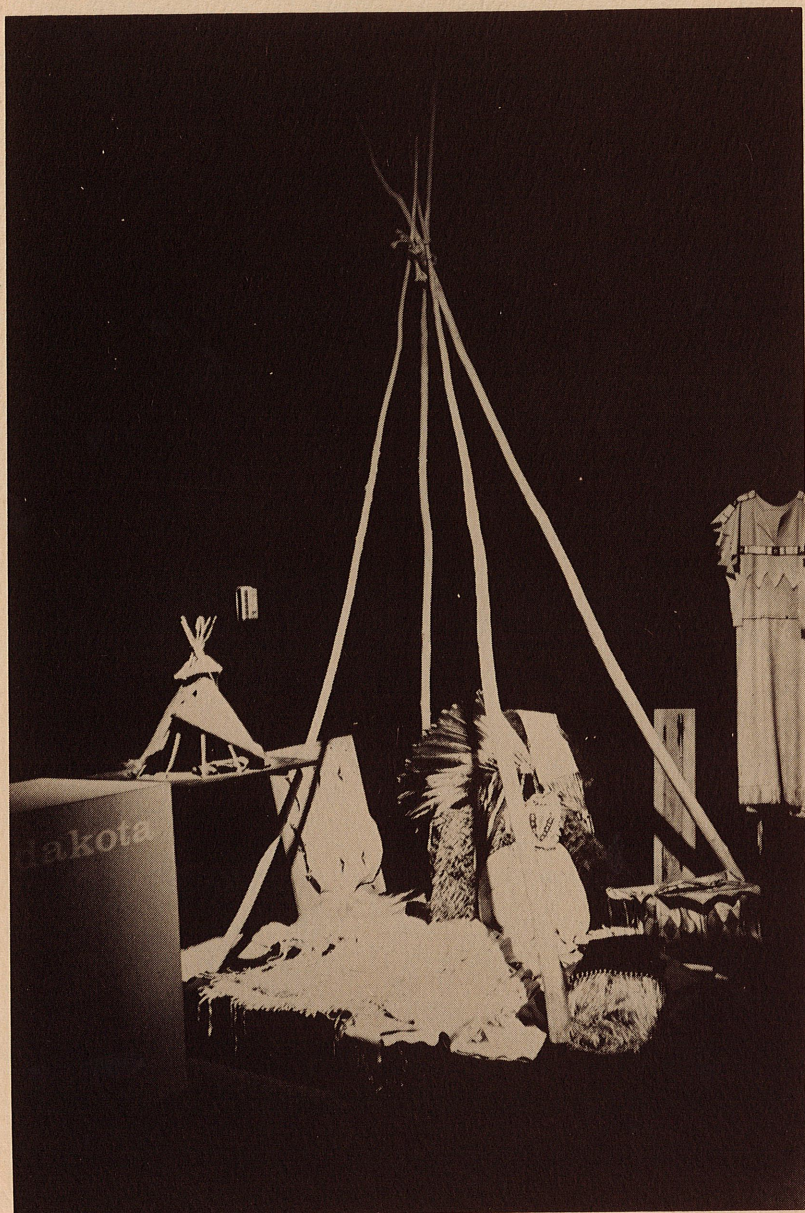












The Science Museum of Minnesota has agreed to assist the Foundation with its expertise, its staff and program coordination, and implementation of a satellite program in the Courthouse. The Minnesota Culture Center will detail the life of indigenous and migrant people in the area, enabling the visitor to experience the world of our forefathers.





The General Store works on the bartering principle, with no cash transactions permitted. Points are awarded to participants based on their knowledge of the subject item traded. People of all ages participate in a program that has proved to be very popular at the Science Museum of Minnesota.







This historic jail area is to be restored in part for tours. Proposed plan for main floor jail includes development of a unique restaurant.



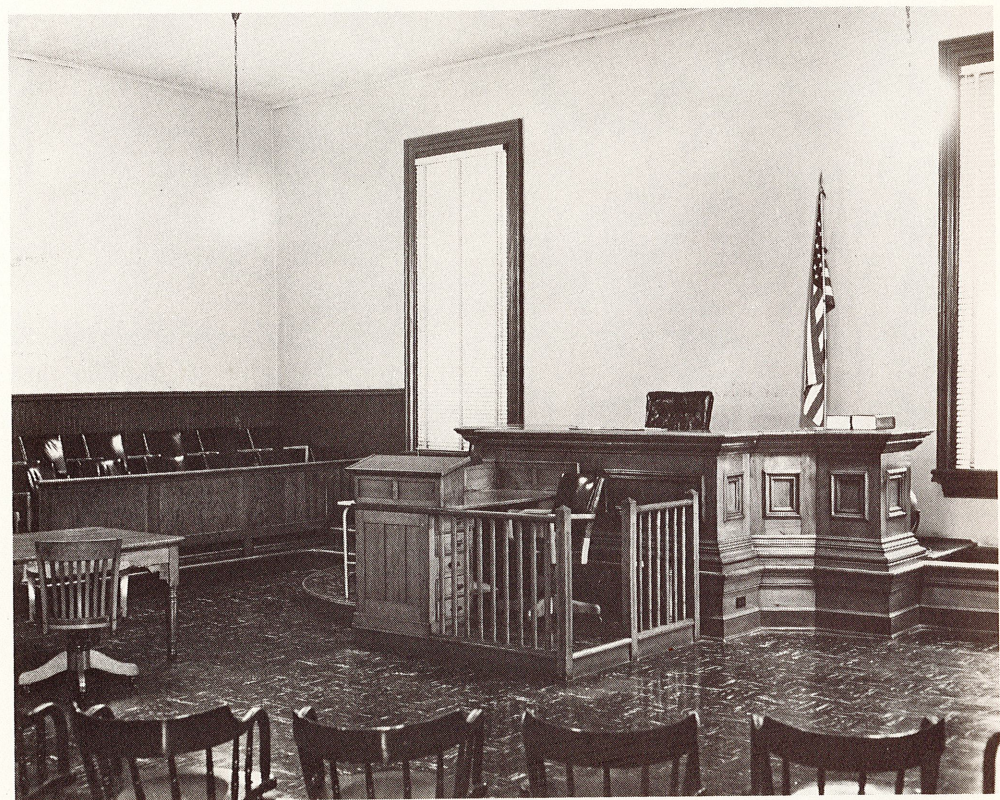


Facilities have already been  
used for a live broadcast  
of Garrison Keillor's  
Prairie Home Companion on  
Minnesota Public Radio.





The Courtroom will be restored to its original condition with the beautiful butternut bench and railing made portable to allow the room to serve many purposes. Performances by theatre companies and educational presentations are planned for this historic setting. Aspiring student lawyers will participate in District Moot Court competition and with the assistance of the Minnesota Historical Society, re-enactment of famous trials will take place.





*"... The Washington County Board of Commissioners  
approve, support and ratify the efforts of the  
Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation  
for funding of the restoration of the former  
Washington County Courthouse."*

COUNTY RESOLUTION

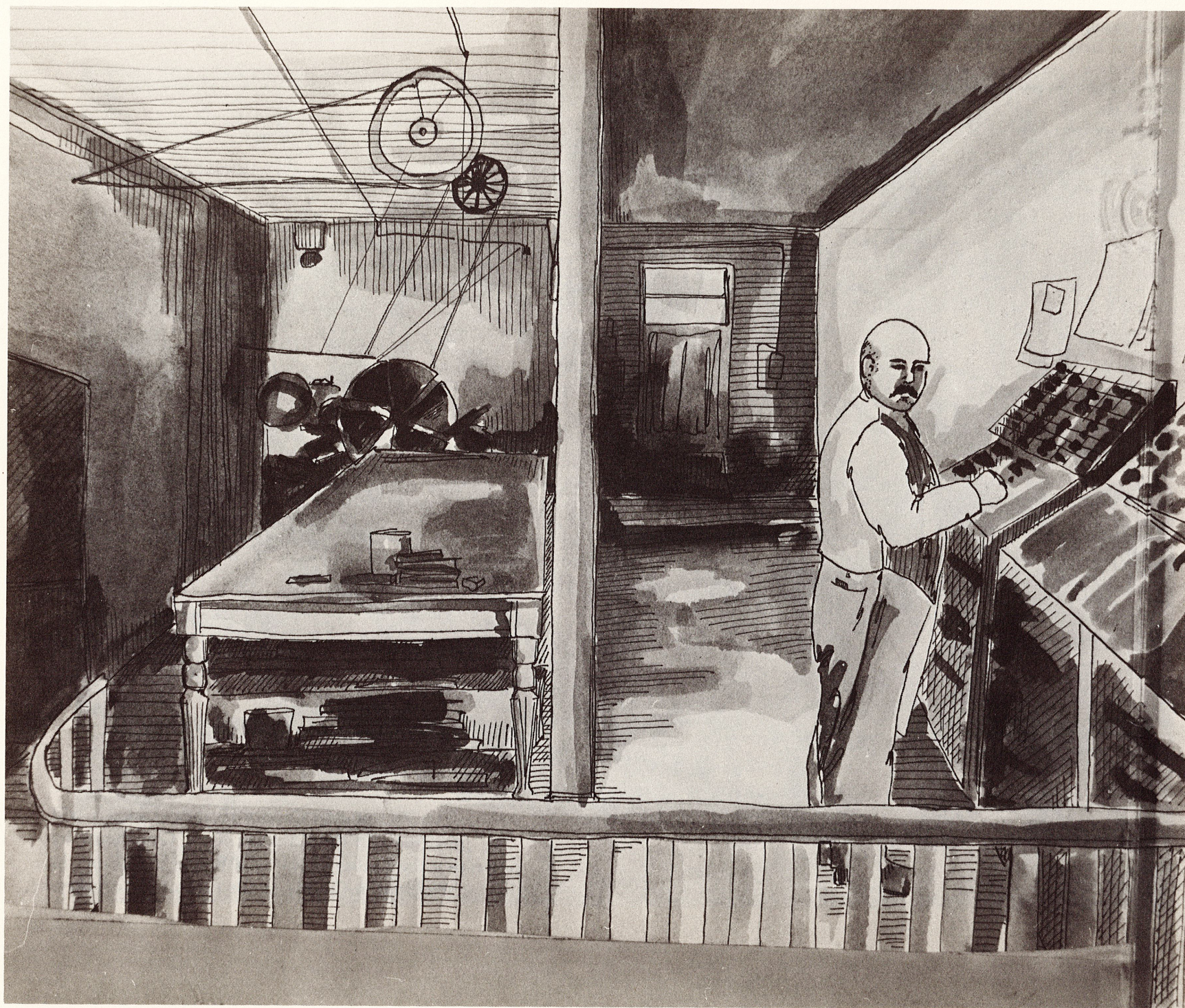
May 6, 1975

Communicating with each  
other took many forms during  
the turn of the century, from

Pony Express to the  
newspaper and the "wireless."

The Press Room with its  
authentic setting and operable  
press is but one "hands on"  
display that will allow the  
visitor to print handbills,  
programs, letterheads and  
other general printing,  
providing an unforgettable  
experience.







*"... The Minnesota Zoological Garden wishes  
to express its support in being a part of the  
Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation's  
proposal to develop a significant interpretive and  
educational exhibit at the  
Washington County Courthouse."*

DONALD BRIDGEWATER, *Director*  
Minnesota Zoological Garden  
Letter: August 30, 1976

The Washington County Historical Society will  
participate in the activities of the Courthouse by  
describing the history of the vital lumbering history in  
Washington County at the turn of the century.







This 1872 photo is the first known picture of the Historic Courthouse building. Looking south from the corner of Main and Chestnut Streets in Stillwater. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Minnesota and Washington County have a long and proud military heritage. The military room with its changing displays will depict this strong tradition from the Civil War to the present and into the future. It will be another educational experience to remember. An exciting, ever-changing program is the most important phase of this project. Utilizing the most historic courthouse in the State of Minnesota to develop a genuinely unique program insures that the greatest possible use can be made of a valuable resource.







## *How You Can Participate*

There are many opportunities for memorial or commemorative gifts as well as designated gifts and grants for the development of the Old Courthouse project.

### *Outright Gifts*

An outright gift can be made to the Courthouse Foundation, and you may specify its use. As a donor to the development of this program, you will receive a handsome certificate, suitable for framing, thanking you for your generosity.

### *Memorial Gifts*

A memorial gift is an ideal way to perpetuate an individual's name. If you desire, the gift may bear the name of the donor as well.

### *Securities and Real Estate*

Securities, stocks and bonds or real estate are always appropriate gifts. Their worth on the day of delivery to Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation is deductible from adjusted income (within the amount specified by law) as a charitable gift with no capital gains tax.

### *Other Property*

WCHCF can receive any bequests in the form of cash or securities. Other types of property are also desirable if they may be sold if the need arises.

### *Life Insurance Gifts*

Life insurance gifts have several advantages. An estate remains intact. Premium payments are a convenient way of accumulating the gift, and if the Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation is irrevocably named beneficiary, premium payments are deductible from adjusted gross income (within the amounts specified by law). The principal is paid to the Courthouse Foundation without delay or expense.

### *Life Income Gifts*

A life income gift can be provided in a trust, with income paid to the donor (or someone he or she designates) during his or her lifetime. When the trust becomes available to the Courthouse Foundation, it may be dedicated for a special purpose. During the year in which the life income gift is made, a considerable portion of the value of the gift can be deducted on the donor's income tax return as a charitable gift.

### *What About Taxes*

Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation qualifies as a public charity. A gift to the Courthouse Foundation thus is tax exempt from Federal Gift and Estate taxes and State inheritance taxes. Gifts are deductible on Federal Income tax returns as charitable contributions to the maximum possible extent.



## *We Need Your Help*

For further information contact:

Washington County Historic Courthouse Foundation

216 North Fourth Street

Stillwater, Minnesota 55082

or call (612) 439-6676

*Photos courtesy of the John Runk Collection.*

*Additional photos courtesy of Jess Mottaz.*

*Photo on page 5 courtesy of Chester Wilson,  
long time attorney in Stillwater.*

*This booklet designed, printed and in part funded by  
Maynard H. Johnson, The Croixside Press, Stillwater.*

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